

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 000481

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/26/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [IR](#) [IS](#) [PEACE](#) [PROCESS](#) [GOI](#) [EXTERNAL](#) [ISRAELI](#) [PALESTINIAN](#) [AFFAIRS](#)

SUBJECT: SENATOR BIDEN AND A/PM OLMERT DISCUSS THE PEACE  
PROCESS, HAMAS, AND IRAN

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Gene A. Cretz for reasons 1.4 (B)  
) and (D).

1. (C) Summary: Alternate Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told Senator Joseph Biden on January 25 --before PLC election results were in -- that he is ready to resume negotiations with Palestinian Authority President Mahmud Abbas and is willing to implement all of Israel's commitments under the roadmap, including movement against illegal outposts and full acceptance of PM Sharon's pledges on settlement construction. He said that for Israel to take such steps, however, Abbas must "amend the PA constitution" (i.e., promulgate effective laws against armed extremists) and begin disarming militants. Olmert expressed a willingness to take measures to improve the economic situation in the Palestinian areas. He raised concerns that the United States could soften its position on Hamas after the elections. Olmert urged the United States to take the lead in creating a strategy to report Iran's nuclear program to the UNSC and to begin a discussion of possible steps to change Iranian behavior. Senator Biden reassured Olmert that the United States shares Israel's overall concerns about the Iranian nuclear program. End summary.

-----  
Olmert Ready to Move Peace Process Forward ...  
-----

2. (C) Olmert said the Israeli public "wants peace badly and is willing to accept compromise." Specifically, Israelis are willing to separate themselves from parts of the "land of Israel" (i.e., much of the West Bank). The roadmap is difficult for Israel, said Olmert, but his government "will fulfill every single part of it." He vowed to remove unauthorized outposts -- starting with the Hebron market -- and fully "abide by the commitments Sharon made about building in settlements." Olmert added that he is "very serious" in his intent to negotiate with President Abbas after the PLC elections. In his view, Abbas genuinely desires peace and "I feel I can negotiate with this man." In response to a question by Senator Biden, Olmert conceded that Israel will be unable to make significant moves until after the Knesset elections in March.

-----  
... Provided Abbas Acts against Terror  
-----

3. (C) Fresh from his previous night's well-received speech at the Herzliya conference, Olmert cautioned that such steps will lead to deep divisions within Israeli society and will not be possible unless Abbas overcomes his "weakness" and acts quickly against extremists. In response to a question by Senator Biden regarding what Israel believes the Palestinians can and should do after the elections Olmert said Abbas must take two steps to be a credible partner for peace: "change the Palestinian constitution" (i.e., amend PA basic laws, effectively requiring groups to renounce violence as a condition for participation in the political process) and begin a process of disarming extremists. Senator Biden commented that the Europeans are beginning to realize that much of the burden to act is on the Palestinians, noting that he had passed a similar message to Abbas earlier in the day.

4. (C) Senator Biden sought Olmert's views on implementing the Agreement on Movement and Access. Olmert responded that Israel is prepared to take steps that will lead to a more favorable environment, but will not begin any political negotiations with "a (PA) government that doesn't fulfill its commitments." Olmert called economic growth a "major issue" for Palestinians, stressing that most Palestinians do not support terrorism and merely want to see improvement in their daily lives. He said he is willing to invest time and resources in every serious effort to overcome bureaucracy and assist in this area. He also emphasized his readiness to meet with U.S., European, Jordanian, Egyptian, and/or Quartet (Wolfensohn) officials to move this agenda forward.

-----  
Concern over U.S. Views on Hamas  
-----

5. (C) Olmert politely disagreed with what he sees as an attempt by the USG to distinguish between Hamas participation in the legislature and in the PA executive, or the "Hizballah

model." He asked what Israel should do if Hamas members are given administrative posts below the cabinet level, such as the head of the customs authority. Olmert returned to the point throughout the discussion, urging the United States to avoid any "complicity" with international cooperation or contacts with Hamas. He called it "inconceivable" that the United States would deal with such a terrorist organization, and insisted that Hamas participation in Palestinian elections does not free Abbas from his obligations under the roadmap. Olmert stressed that his time as mayor of Jerusalem -- including visits to bombing sites, meetings with victims' families, and participation in numerous funerals -- has left him with a real understanding of the horrors of terrorism.

16. (C) Senator Biden reassured Olmert that he will continue to oppose any U.S. assistance or support for a Hamas government, saying that the U.S. position on Hamas would not change unless there is a fundamental shift in the group's position towards terror and violence. He urged Olmert to keep the focus on Hamas as an internal Palestinian problem -- "they must solve it" -- and to avoid steps that would allow the extremists to portray it as a Palestinian-Israeli issue.

17. (C) Saying he had "made up my mind since day one" to facilitate the PLC elections, Olmert noted that his decision had opened Kadima up to accusations of "bringing Hamas into Jerusalem" by Likud leader Binyamin Netanyahu. Olmert said he had spoken with Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz the day after Sharon's stroke to inform him that the GOI would need to make arrangements for limited voting by Palestinians in Jerusalem. Senator Biden complimented the poise with which the Israeli Government in general, and Olmert in particular, have handled the difficult period following PM Sharon's hospitalization.

-----  
Olmert Urges U.S. Leadership  
to Counter Iranian Nuclear Threat  
-----

18. (C) Olmert asked Senator Biden to tell others in Washington that he had discussed Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons with "a very concerned prime minister." Although Israel would be the first target for such weapons, Olmert said, the GOI should not get out in front on the issue. In his view, the only chance to prevent Iranian development of a nuclear capability is for the United States to "dictate" a strategy to the EU, China, and Russia involving a report to the UNSC and a debate on steps to alter Iranian behavior (i.e., sanctions).

19. (C) Senator Biden explained the factors currently affecting U.S. policy and stressed the importance of ensuring the correct outcome from any UNSC debate. He highlighted the need to re-engage the silent majority of Iranians who want better relations with the U.S. by keeping the Europeans on our side and by using our leverage with Russia to get Moscow to exert pressure on Tehran. While noting differences between U.S. and Israeli assessments on the timeframe for Iran's "point of no return," he reassured Olmert that the United States shares Israel's overall concerns about the Iranian nuclear program.

110. (U) PM Sharon's foreign policy advisor and spokesperson, Shalom Tourgeman and Asaf Shariv, also participated in the meeting along with MFA Deputy Director General for North America Yoram Ben Ze'ev and MFA Congressional Affairs Director Eyal Sela. Senator Biden was accompanied by DCM Gene Cretz, Democratic staff director Antony Blinken, professional staff member Puneet Talwar, and an embassy notetaker.

111. (U) This cable was cleared by Senator Biden.

\*\*\*\*\*  
Visit Embassy Tel Aviv's Classified Website:  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/telaviv>

You can also access this site through the State Department's  
Classified SIPRNET website.

\*\*\*\*\*  
JONES